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OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
TREATMENT OF THE NEGROES,
Slavery IN THE
ISLAND OF JAMAICA,
INCLUDING
SOME ACCOUNT OF THEIR TEMPER AND CHARACTER,
WITH
REMARKS
ON THE IMPORTATION OF SLAVES
FROM THE
COAST OF AFRICA.
IN A LETTER
TO A PHYSICIAN IN ENGLAND,
FROM HECTOR M'NEILL. & *Whiteley*

BRITANNICI BELLII EXITUS EXPECTATUR. CONSTAT ENIM
ADITUS INSULÆ ESSE MUNITOS MIRIFICIS MOLIBUS:
ETIAM ILLUD JAM COGNITUM EST, NEQUE ARGENTI
SCRIPULUM ESSE ULLUM IN ILLA INSULA, NEQUE UL-
LAM SPEM PRÆDÆ NISI EX MANCIPIIIS.

CICERO, EPIST. AD ATTICUM, LIB. IV.

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tined for those social and joyous feasts which constitute the principal delight of the Negro *. Had his curiosity prompted him to investigate matters more minutely, he would have found in many of these habitations, an arrangement of apartments; a propriety of furniture; a supply of utensils and a decency, and even parade of apparel, little to be expected in the possession of Slaves.

All this, 'tis true, although often, is not generally met with; but it proves what an industrious well disposed Negro may do, if he chuses, at the same time that it elucidates the lenity and encouragement they experience, and how little real cause there is for supposing WEST INDIA masters and governors hardened, cruel, and inattentive. In fact, it is not yesterday that the planter has perceived his error in harsh usage, and his advantage in paying every attention to the welfare of his Slave.

Formerly, it is said, the inhuman master considered these

* Add to these advantages, that on those estates which have pens for breeding cattle, it is no uncommon circumstance for the Negroes to be in possession of 15, 20, 30, and sometimes 40 head, from the indulgence of the proprietors in allowing the cattle of industrious Slaves to feed and multiply among their own. As I am on this subject, I shall relate a singular circumstance which happened in this neighbourhood, and which afforded me great delight when I heard it. On a proprietor of a large sugar work having fallen behind hand, the Negroes on his estate collected among themselves 300l. which they laid at his feet, and in their rude eloquence implored him to accept. It is with peculiar pleasure I record this fact; which, (although it accords not with the general disposition of the Negro) proves not only the wealth which these people possess, but their attachment to a good master.

these devoted wretches in no other point of view than as so many cattle that would, for a certain number of years, continue to perform their dreadful tasks, and then expire. This term, I have been told, was seldom expected to exceed 7 or 8 years, in which time, from labouring hard, not only during the day, but part of the night, exhausted nature sunk under the load of accumulated oppression: But times and circumstances have altered wonderfully.--- The value, or more properly speaking, the original price of the Negro, has, in the course of thirty years, risen upwards of one third †; the proprietor is therefore led to view Negro Property as an object of great concern, and consequently is disposed to preserve it by every prudent method. Hence, the great change in the treatment of Negroes, and hence, thank God! the source of those comforts and indulgences which meliorate and sweeten the cup of Slavery. Unless it is during crop time (*i. e.* the making of sugar and rum, when, from the constant attention necessary for the production of these articles, every person takes his *spell* or watch in the boiling-house or mill one night in three) ‡ no Negro is compelled to labour after

† About 30 years ago the price of a new Negro was commonly from 35l. to 40l. at present the current price is from 65l. to 70l.

‡ This period generally continues four months, and from the circumstance of *nightly* labour may, perhaps, be considered as the most dreadful part of Negro Slavery. It is however, on the contrary, the happiest period in the year; a fact, evident not only from the general appearance of the Negroes, but from the cheerfulness and good health that accompany all their actions. During *Crop*, every Negro is allowed to eat as much of the *cane*, and drink as much of the *hot liquor* from

after it is dark. A comfortable evening's repast, and night's rest, enable him to return with vigour to the next morning's work, which, however strange it may appear, is by no means so hard as that of many of the labouring poor in *Great Britain* §.

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from the coppers, as he chuses. Of these two articles they are particularly fond, and it is really incredible how much of both they consume. These saccharine juices it would appear are productive of excellent effects, particularly on those who from sloth or disease have been meagre and weakly; for from the commencement till the conclusion of the crop, Negroes may be said to encrease daily in health, strength, plumpness and spirits. During the whole night, labour is accompanied by song. The young girls in particular, sing in parts, and as a good ear and an African are inseparable; to the lover of music and humanity, their music is a double feast. Often have I enjoyed it at the expence of rest; and often has it smoothed my pillow, and lulled me into slumbers. Let this picture which I do assure you is drawn from invariable practice in this island, be an answer to those idle accounts which have lately been palmed on the public.

§ Of late years considerable changes have been introduced in this island to ease bodily labour. The *digging of cane holes*, is, undoubtedly, the most severe work the negro has to execute; but since the introduction of the *plow*, which prepares the ground for the *hoe*, the fatigue comparatively speaking is nothing. I have been informed, that the negroes now are rather fond than otherwise of this species of labour; for on every well regulated estate they are during the digging of cane holes, daily and plentifully supplied with good punch. In a short time I should suppose the whole of this work will be generally performed by cattle, a plow having been lately invented for that purpose, which it is said answers extremely well. As to the article of *picking grass*, on which so much has been said by late writers, no such thing now exists in this island. I believe, however, that neither this alleviation, nor that of the plow has yet been generally introduced in the other islands.—In Grenada, I am confidently informed, that the old practices still prevail,

The immense losses sustained by the late hurricanes, which swept away almost every thing but *Negro property*, has occasioned a double attention to its preservation, as the only means of retrieving by labour, what calamities had utterly destroyed.

Independent of a variety of instances, which might be here adduced in support of the assertion, that every humane attention is *now* paid by the Planter to his Slave, the *Consolidated Slave Act*, just passed by the Assembly of this island, is not unworthy attention. Formerly, if a White Man, whether proprietor or otherwise, killed a Negro, or was the cause of his death by any act of severity, he was, for the first offence, entitled to benefit of Clergy, and not liable to capital punishment till a repetition of the crime. By the present law, it is enacted, "That if any person, whether owner or superintendant of Slaves, shall be convicted of having, by any act of passion or cruelty, occasioned the death of any Negro, it shall be capital for the *first* offence; and for the greater security of the property, and as a check on those who may have the punishment of Slaves in their power, it is particularly required, that every surgeon or doctor belonging to each estate, shall swear to the cause of the death of each Negro, to the best of his knowledge and belief; and, if any Negro dies, and is interred by the owner or overseer, without the doctor's having seen or been sent for to such Negro, in this case, the owner or overseer causing the Negro to be so interred, is liable to a prosecution for such conduct. This is intended, no doubt, to restrain the wanton abuse of power; the violence of ungarded passion, and the no less fatal, though apparently less cruel, effects of indolence or wilful inattention to the welfare of the Slave.

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